

ALEX KOVACS

THE
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OF
PAPER

A NOVEL



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“. . . labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification.”

—*The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx

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Observing the Progress of Time

(1950)

Maximilian Sacheverell Hollingsworth wondered if he could dictate the entire course of his life on a single day. After some deliberation, a process lasting the length of a Wednesday morning, he concluded that it was possible. Suddenly, with no prior warning, it seemed to him a matter of some urgency to plan all of the details of his adulthood whilst he was still a young man. Brimming with optimism, he hoped that it was simply necessary to decide what he most wanted to do and in which order. Immediately he set to work upon the drafting of a plan.

At noon he sat inside a public house in Bloomsbury. This was a place populated only by solitary male drinkers, isolated men wearing ruffled coats and smoking pipes emitting circles of smoke that hovered and drifted in an unfurling cloud above their heads. Grey sunlight dissolved into the dingy huddles of shadows thrown from the battered furnishings. In studied silence the barmaid washed empty glasses and placed them in long neat rows along the dark mahogany shelves. Maximilian sat at the left end of the bar, beside the thick length of rope that dangled from the mouth of the silent brass bell, drinking a succession of pints of bitter ale, his gaze directed out towards the street in the hope of discovering fresh inspirations. With the progress of his imbibing he felt the slowness of the afternoon unwinding down the length of his spine.

No matter that his plan had to exclude innumerable torments and banalities which he was destined to encounter, that it could not possibly survive for years on end without mutations and excisions, that in many of its details it was probably lacking in all pragmatism, all that was significant was the necessity of forming a definitive set of strategies, a declaration of intention based upon his genuine desires, distillations of urges that he had possessed since he was a child. In all the foolishness and idealism of youth, he forged a series of eternal vows.

Disappearing without leaving a single clue to his whereabouts, he would dedicate himself to the completion of numerous projects, living out a life crowded with impossible undertakings and miraculous pursuits, all incognito, with no one privy to his role until after his death. He would investigate arcane branches of knowledge, brand every neglected street and alleyway with his footsteps, consecrate secret temples to the gods of wisdom and delirium, serve as an unseen philanthropist to thousands of people.

Ordinary ambitions did not interest him. He possessed no desire to excel within a regular field, to build any sort of successful career. Instead he would perform acts of a kind that had barely been encountered before, challenging the boundaries of what it was possible to do within the span of a lifetime. His projects would perhaps fall within the category, broadly speaking, of “art,” but would refuse to utilise the terms or follow

the strictures of any artistic establishment or school. Primal experience, rather than formal aesthetic statements, would be his priority: experiencing it, guiding it, making a gift of it to others. All would be done in secret and no one else would be permitted to see his work for what it was until he had died. Only then would he reveal the extent of his labours to those who were prepared to listen.

Having broken all contact with his aristocratic family and their milieu, Maximilian found himself employed for forty hours each week at a printing works in Dagenham. His time there was dominated by a series of awful mindless repetitions, cycles of tedium that almost succeeded in destroying him. Already he had been there for nearly two years and he was finding it difficult to see quite how he would escape. Entering the workplace each morning was so dispiriting that it felt like he was being repeatedly punched in the face. Headaches would soon settle in for the duration of the day. Exhaustion clung to his limbs, became engrained, a part of the mechanics governing his body motions.

The little education that he had received was due to his own appetite for the reading of books. His attempts to build an intellect within the confines of his room became the great secret that he shielded from his colleagues. Passing his days at the printing works largely in silence, on the few occasions he was required to speak he would imitate a working-class accent with whichever monosyllables seemed necessary. He was a cipher to his colleagues; no one had any idea that when he returned home he was engaged in the furious processes of study. Towers of books, perennially in danger of collapsing, reached up towards his ceiling. Every night he would read for hours on end, often until he could no longer adequately focus his eyes upon the words that lay before him.

On that fateful Wednesday in Bloomsbury, time he had stolen for himself by feigning sickness, all of his energies were poured into the completion of his plan. In the space of three hours he weighed up the relative importance of each of his ambitions, estimating how long he would need to devote to them. He then placed them into a timetable that ran to exactly fifty years, with each individual year taken into account. Some of his schemes were grand enough to take up months or years at a time, whilst others were minor, relatively insignificant actions that might be performed in the space of a few minutes. As soon as the words had been declared upon the page, rendered elegantly in black ink with his fountain pen, it seemed certain to him that they spoke of the truth, that what they described would one day exist. Even before he had finished writing them, the plans began to possess a definitive hold on him, a mysterious authority that few other forces could lay claim to.

He imagined the span of his entire life. How would it feel to wake up each year and discover that he was older? To observe his features in the mirror as time gnawed them away? Recently, as a consequence of thoughts like these, he had found himself obsessed with the minutiae of the era into which he had been born. He noted its conventions of form, observable in newspapers and advertisements and bus tickets. How long would it take for fashions to change? Which course would they take? Would he notice when they did?

In one sense, the idea of learning how the future would alter such details caused him great excitement. Every year ahead would possess its own peculiar character, for him individually as well as on a much wider scale. He hoped that he would prove to be

capable of noticing the changes as time moved on. A part of him was frightened of remaining fixed to his current mental co-ordinates, of never evolving in tandem with the shifts of history that everyone else acknowledged. He was determined to never fall into any sort of complacency.

Looking up from the pages of his notebook, he registered the details of his surroundings for the first time in more than an hour. Many of the old men were still present, emptying their glasses of drink as slowly as they could manage. Despondently, the barmaid leafed through a newspaper. Maximilian smiled to himself. Whilst the rest of the world remained locked in perpetual stasis, he had shifted the course of his life. His plan was complete. Soon the bar would be closed for the duration of the afternoon.

Emerging back out on the street, he came upon a burst of pigeons, scattering in profusion as they broke into flight. Strolling across Bedford Square he peered into the well-polished windows, encountering scenes presided upon by men wearing suits, framed within black brickwork and cream-white arches, figures moving with the authority of learning and money, enclosed by definitive partitions of black railing, their offices looking out onto a giant oval-shaped park that could only be entered by key holders.

Visitors spilt out from the great doors of the British Museum, thronging the courtyard with footsteps and murmuring before walking away down Great Russell Street towards many separate destinies. A few streets away the beacon of Senate House appeared to him, the bulk of its body rising towards the skies with malevolent grandeur. Wandering amongst the university buildings, he gazed upon the rooms in which he imagined extraordinary conversations taking place, occasions that could leave indelible imprints upon those who had been present. Sensing the scale of the mass of rooms surrounding him, he considered the silences of the libraries, the academic offices holding bookcases and dishevelled piles of papers, the scientific laboratories and hospital wards and the residencies of eminent families. He wanted to be a part of this manic activity.

Nearby, a pullulating cloud of wood smoke emerged from the back garden of a house, drifting over the brick walls, winding itself into the grey air hanging over the stretches of lawns and pavements, seeping into Maximilian's nostrils, a scent which was destined to stay with him for the duration of his days.

A Short Essay Written by the Protagonist

(1951)

1. The conditions are now in place for capitalism to flourish once more. Inevitably it will do so, escalating further and further, until we finally face collapse.
2. The task now for anyone with any sensitivity and intellect should be to oppose this state of affairs in any way that they can.
3. The consequence of a society that places money at its centre is that forms of mental and physical slavery come to dominate human life.
4. Certain forms of expenditure are undoubtedly for the public good. Nevertheless, all that is moral in such cases is the intention that lies behind a given act of spending and the performance of that act. Sums of money cannot become moral in and of themselves.
5. Finally, money is impossible to define. It appears in such a vast range of contexts, being utilised for so many different reasons, that any objective explanation of its ultimate character becomes elusive to those who seek it.
6. The vast majority of ways in which money circulates have enormously destructive consequences. Human relationships inevitably suffer as a result, becoming insipid, superficial, mechanical reductions of what is possible. Tenderness is rarely achieved on the scale it could be because individuals are trapped within the structures of employment. In the current system most human beings have little knowledge of the full spectrum of the emotional and intellectual vocabulary that the species is capable of achieving.
7. Paradoxically, the only way for anyone to overcome the punishing effects of a world dominated by money is for them to acquire a large amount of money for themselves. Otherwise, different forms of poverty and slavery will ensue.
8. Money, considered from one perspective, can be seen as an enormous collection of

numbers, somewhat arbitrarily selected by fate.

9. The usual ways in which money circulates are routinely accepted by society as the proper state of affairs. Given such an absence of reason, certain acts usually condemned as immoral have the potential to become moral if performed for the right reasons. Certain forms of larceny and fraud fall into this category.

10. Any free-thinking individual *must* do everything within their power to escape the obscene working conditions that prevail in the free-market system. This is equivalent to, and no less imperative than, for example, fleeing your country because it has descended into war.

11. Certain acts of labour are necessary and society must acknowledge those who perform them. That this acknowledgment must be financial in nature is an assumption whose basis in reality has not yet been demonstrated to any satisfactory extent.

12. When money is the sole objective of an action, a certain degree of idiocy is inevitable.

13. Money shows its true face in the context of mass production. There, it becomes clear that money necessarily poisons all that it touches.

14. Every advertisement could be replaced with a work of art.

15. The state requires that an individual be in possession of a certain amount of the currency that it has itself created and controlled the distribution of. The only *moral* argument for such an arrangement is that it would seem to encourage an individual to contribute a certain amount of his or her labour to society. However, one may nonetheless obtain money through means no less legal but in no way related to the performance of labour as it has been thus far defined. No limits have been placed upon these means, or those who exploit them.

16. If Members of Parliament wish to order millions of people to “participate in the national economy,” then it is surely only fair that they should themselves contribute a certain number of hours of labour to the “necessary” factories, offices, and kitchens that they have forced into existence.

17. There is no good reason for governments not to introduce the concept of a “maximum wage” into law, with the parallel dictum of a “minimum wage” existing at a level not far underneath. The result would be societies of relative material equality in which both excessive wealth and poverty would have no place.

18. The horror of menial work as currently practised should not be underestimated. To

spend forty hours a week or more engaged in unceasing cycles of senseless repetition, as do most human beings, is a destructive form of existence for anyone to have to endure.

19. In a more just and sane society it would be compulsory to partake in forms of whichever *necessary* menial work existed, distributing the quotas of such work fairly, whilst simultaneously providing the opportunity for educational and creative pursuits on a no less equal basis.

20. Throughout its history, money has been synonymous with anxiety, intolerance, selfishness, anger, mistrust, and, of course, greed. That these states of mind are considered necessary consequences of the economic system in which we live is simply unacceptable. No system predicated upon such emotions can be considered salutary or, indeed, rational.

21. Money is the great patterning and organizing force in the world. It shapes the narratives within which most of us must live; it dictates the ways in which our bodies move and speak and think, thereby excluding an infinity of possible subjects and stances. We should attempt to challenge and overthrow these narratives.

I Promise to Pay the Bearer

(1952–1998)

Merely setting foot in the Dagenham printing works each morning was an activity that soon became loathsome to Maximilian. The proprietor of the business, one Mr. Bradley, was a corpulent white-haired man who was often engaged in the act of wiping sweat away from his forehead with a handkerchief. Most working days would see him sitting in his little office, fiddling around with figures in his notebook, or, simply, doing as little as he possibly could. Occasionally he would emerge from hiding in order to attend to his workers, frequently shouting abuse at them with a booming, guttural voice that challenged the roar and whir of the machinery by which they all were dominated.

In the evenings, Maximilian would shuffle back to his room, his clothes and hands covered with ink, his limbs aching from the day's boredoms and exertions, his mind exhausted and spent. When in this state, he was barely capable of any intellectual activity at all. Slumping on his bed, dejected, he would stare vacantly up at the ceiling, following the elaborate maze of cracks gradually forming there. Lighting a cigarette, he would watch the smoke rise and curl into spirals before him as he attempted to marshal energies he usually found he no longer possessed.

After spending a couple of months teaching himself how to pick locks, Maximilian began to break into the printing works in the middle of the night. He was working on a private project, a pursuit which kept him almost as busy as his "real" work: learning the art of counterfeiting. It was only through counterfeiting that he saw any likelihood of obtaining freedom. In all, he spent just over a year breaking into the works, entirely between the hours of two and four A.M. on weekday evenings only, hours when he was certain to encounter no one, but which were nevertheless wracked with paranoia and adrenaline. Returning to the building later in the morning, he would fight through waves of exhaustion, doing his best to pretend that he was alert and attentive.

Once he felt assured of his abilities as a counterfeiter, he began to produce an enormous quantity of currency that he initially kept inside a number of boxes hoarded underneath his bed. Once these had accumulated to the extent that he could afford to buy his own printing press, as well as property in which to operate it, he would turn his back on the premises of Mr. Bradley. However, it seemed to take a preternaturally long time for that point to be reached. His progress was exceedingly, unexpectedly slow and many months of boredom and toil ensued, until it seemed as if each working day was spent sleepwalking, and that there would never be any end to his ordeal.

It was during this period that Maximilian first found himself drifting into a state of complete solitude. Wary of his pastime being discovered, he no longer allowed anyone to enter his room. Feeling a general contempt for the direction that society was taking, he turned his back on the very few friends that he had, eventually refusing all meetings without exception. After only a few months of this, he could no longer even contemplate any other way of living.

Finally, in March 1953, he believed that he had printed enough banknotes to resign from Bradley and Co. That spring, Maximilian made a number of preparations for his future. Visiting a tailor in Marylebone, he bought himself his first suit of any genuine quality. Attired thus he began to scour properties all over the East End, paying particular attention to the factor of privacy. Settling upon a warehouse overlooking Hackney Marshes, he soon installed the equipment that he required and began his lifelong task of printing a relentless stream of illegitimate banknotes.

By paying great attention to every last detail of design, as well as keeping abreast of every change enacted upon UK currency, Maximilian produced replicas that were so exact, so perfect in every respect, that only the most attentive and experienced of cashiers noticed that a given slip of paper being passed between one hand and another was not in fact the authentic work of the Bank of England. No business ever found itself in trouble on account of Maximilian's actions. For forty-seven years he was entirely successful in using his notes without the slightest problem arising.

He took many elaborate precautions, of course, with the whole enterprise, not wanting to put the life that he was building for himself at risk. He would always wear a pair of leather gloves when handling the notes, and he was careful to wear only drab, plain clothes, always assuming an expression of bland contentment. His manner and appearance were so ordinary that it was almost impossible to remember him afterwards.

As a rule, he would never make a purchase in the same shop within a span of ten years. This required an enormous amount of travelling from one part of the city to another, an activity which he pursued doggedly on a regular basis for a number of decades, often passing through the hundreds of forgotten London suburbs, an itinerary that included Wanstead, Ilford, Barking, Bexley, Farnborough, Sidcup, Teddington, Hayes, Ruislip, Stanmore, Enfield, Wanstead . . .

He only printed notes of a low denomination because these aroused fewer suspicions. When spent they would generate a great deal of legitimate small change which he would discreetly collect in his briefcase and then take back to deposit in one of the many crates of money that were secreted in his warehouse at Hackney Marshes. If he wished to make a major purchase, he would always draw upon his pile of legitimate currency, most of which found its way over time into one of the many bank accounts that he kept, each bearing relatively paltry sums.

Maximilian often marvelled that the majority of people pay so little attention to the money that passes through their hands. Few people bother to hold a banknote up to the light and examine just what it is they're holding. This seemed more and more remarkable to him over time. How could so many manage to be blind to the forms that these slips of paper took?

Frequently, he found himself admiring the complexity of British banknote designs, particularly those which had arrived after the onset of decimalisation in 1971, an event

which had necessitated several months of extremely hard work in order to produce suitable replicas. Only rarely did anyone consider that on the banknotes printed after this date the Queen mysteriously manages to maintain her youth; that on close scrutiny her eyes are revealed to be composed of a series of spirals, making her look like a victim of hypnosis; that detailed illustrations of various historical figures are made up of a complex series of colours, dots and lines; that the paper is thick and waxy, printed on a special cotton weave rarely encountered in any other context in British life; that each banknote has a separate number, a thin strip of silver, a watermark, a shining hologram; that on each side of each banknote a variety of different typefaces are employed—sometimes for the space of a single word alone; and that on each banknote is printed the phrase “I Promise to Pay the Bearer”—an entirely out-dated reference to the origins of paper money as simple promissory notes . . .

Maximilian often had cause to consider all of this. He came to the conclusion that to even notice such details was to challenge the moral authority of the banknote. Thoughts such as his might potentially move an individual towards the idea that their banknotes could exist in different forms, that, indeed, *they did not have to appear in the world at all*. Which is not a line of thinking that most citizens want to pursue for very long. Perhaps because it leads in short order to feelings of confusion and anger, to feelings of alienation, to a sense of separation from all of the many other people willing to accept the role of the banknote within their lives. Maximilian presumed that most people were anxious to protect themselves from the cognitive dissonance that might be caused by pursuing the many potential convolutions of thought hidden beneath the surface of the world. Instead, he felt, everyone instinctively taught themselves to ask as few questions as possible, in the hope that this would bring as much lightness and prosperity as they were capable of attaining.

He never had any qualms about his career as a counterfeiter. Maximilian thought that it was absolutely necessary to challenge the moral authority of money. In his opinion such a system had to be held responsible for many instances of suffering, exclusion, degradation, ignorance, vanity, ugliness, violence, and poverty. In his own oblique way, by behaving as a criminal, he felt that he was staging a protest against this state of affairs.

Every time that he spent one of his own banknotes, he bought himself a newspaper. Over time he gathered these together on the second floor of his warehouse, arranging them in bundles and rows, carefully labelling them by month and year, keeping the tabloids separate from the broadsheets. The newspapers provided an index to his life. Sometimes he liked to walk from one end of the collection to the other, beginning in 1952 and ending in 1998. As he progressed, the colour of the paper gradually shifted from brown to yellow to white, with hundreds of barely discernible shades of each colour forming a spectrum of decay. The typefaces, layout and size of the words shifted with the whims of fashion. Photographs gradually took up more space, then became clearer, were eventually printed in colour. Society itself travelled from one era to another and then to another. Entire years and decades raced by in a matter of footsteps. His entire adult life was documented here and the memories that the newspapers provoked were different each time he ventured up to the second floor.

To enter the newspaper room he had to pass through a narrow trapdoor, his head peeping into the long cone of light thrown from the only window. Atoms of dust

would rise in drifting circles, waver softly in the gaseous brown air, settle onto forgotten objects. He spent many hours there alone, idling. Hours when he would trace a finger over surfaces, following patterns and shapes found in the skin of the floors and walls. The smell of ancient paper mingled with the dust and rotting carpets. The room was lit by a single bare lightbulb precariously dangling from a thin length of wire. In odd moments of inspiration he had scrawled flurries of words in pencil on to the dirty beige walls. These were sometimes quotations from the news stories he had read, their dates and page numbers written at the bottom and circled. On other occasions he wrote hurried passages and fragments inspired by literary works.

His collection of newspapers became a resource that he would consult with regard to a multitude of purposes. If he wanted to generate ideas, objects, or phrases at random he would choose a particular date and then open the relevant newspaper to see what it contained. When, on a given evening, he wished to remember a certain year, he would go upstairs and linger in the attic. He found that it was the incidental details that most stimulated his interest and provoked the most potent memories. The choice of certain words, a particular font, the cut of a dress in a photograph, these could all bring back the look and feel of a particular year or period, evoking the often unconscious textures and attitudes he had absorbed, though not always aware of them at the time.

He never cut out any clippings from the papers; he found that he preferred the beauty of a complete and untarnished issue. He cherished the illusion of being able to open a newspaper “as if upon the day itself”. This constituted one of his principal and favourite methods of time travel. When he concentrated, he was capable of convincing himself that he had actually taken up residence in a past year. It came down to nothing more than playing some music recorded in that year, looking over some old photographs, reading the relevant newspaper. And there it was, the year existed once more. If he then spent the rest of the day indoors and busied himself with a task that could conceivably have occurred in 1956, then for all intents and purposes he had successfully transported himself to 1956. Once more he would find himself living through its many pleasures and disappointments.

Surveying the many stacks of paper, Maximilian would often grin. It was a matter of some satisfaction to him that his activities in this one particular, not especially auspicious building had opened into a multitude of other events, stretching far beyond the boundaries of the present moment. From here he had begun to construct his own invisible world. All that he had known after a certain age had found its origins in this location.

Details of Some Principal Coordinates

(1953)

Parliament Hill, NW3

On five occasions that summer, Maximilian ventured here at night, bringing a deckchair with him, in which he would sit for some hours, gazing down upon the city spread-eagled below, forming a series of irreverent Morse code messages with a heavy torch.

17 Bisham Gardens, N6

Where through the front window Maximilian had once seen an enormously obese man, wearing a pink bowtie and white braces, being given a singing lesson by a teacher possessing a rather stern countenance, who was seemingly fond of jabbing his fingers into the air and making many excited remarks in Italian.

Putney Library, SW15

One of Maximilian's principal haunts at this time, where he would often leaf through a standard guide to astronomy of the period, a volume which he had not been able to locate at any other venue and which contained particularly beautiful illustrations of comets.

133 Amhurst Road, E8

Location of a public house which Maximilian always entered when following a route that he frequently walked that year (a walk that was planned to every last detail, which was circular, and which he only took on Saturday afternoons, the day and time for which it had been expressly intended).

Brompton Cemetery, SW10

The place in which Maximilian had decided he would most like to be buried. This was due to the cemetery's centrality, relative modesty, and the beauty it offered the visitor when approached at dusk in winter.

314 Grove Green Road, E11

A junk shop with window displays that Maximilian was often drawn to because of their absolute lack of order and decorum, indeed of any sense of composition

whatsoever. Certain fascinating objects remained in perpetual window repertory, and of these Maximilian became particularly fixated upon a wooden figurine of a Japanese dancer, dressed in a navy-blue kimono, one foot lifted, frozen in air, its left hand clutching a pink chrysanthemum.

12 Caversham Road, NW5

Maximilian saw the head of one of the residents of this property briefly emerge from a window, an image perceived through a pair of binoculars after an extensive series of roving through doorways, drainpipes, steeples, and chimneys.

The Oval, SE11

Maximilian enjoyed spending the entire day here during cricket matches, being ostentatiously preoccupied with anything other than sport. He would sunbathe, watch the animated faces of the many gathered spectators, eat packets of nuts, and read novels, but only rarely would he pay any attention to the vicissitudes of the cricketers parading in the foreground. As far as he was concerned, their presence was required to provide an ambience that would flavour his other, more pressing activities.

96 South Ealing Road, W5

A tailor's shop, home to a mannequin that Maximilian felt bore a startling facial resemblance to him. He liked to come and visit this individual, almost a perfected version of himself, physically speaking, and compare his own sartorial choices and general demeanour with that of his double.

6 Isabella Street, SE1

Final destination of a paper aeroplane bearing a handwritten message whose trajectory commenced within the immediate proximity of an adjacent address, and which, in the event, was encountered by no one other than Maximilian himself, who was engaged in a preliminary attempt at paper aeroplane making and throwing, and was in fact disappointed by the results of his efforts.

16 Blackhorse Lane, E17

Site of a café where Maximilian would occasionally dine, amongst clattering chairs, steam risings, stained mirrors, tables which each held a single occupant. He would gape at the void of his reflection, sitting through many dead idle hours.

8 Ballast Quay, SE10

Approximate source of an extended chain of considerations arising from the glimpsing of a turtle-shaped ocarina, which Maximilian had seen displayed in the front window of this property.

43 Roman Road, E2

Premises to which Maximilian would travel especially in order to communicate with a pair of blue-throated macaws, creatures with whom he felt he had begun to develop an

affinity.

83 Blomfield Road, W2

Address to which Maximilian sent a mysterious chain of correspondence to an unseen recipient bearing the alias of “Jonah Plinkerton,” an individual who claimed to have once been involved in the manufacturing of fondue-sets. After a prolonged dialogue about eighteenth-century fountain design, their letters eventually turned to detailed considerations of the representation of snails throughout the history of painting.

Camberwell Baths, SE5

On the 19th of November that year, a phial of green ink was opened in the swimming pool at this location, an act performed purely to facilitate aesthetic contemplation. Afterwards, a large compensatory cash donation was sent to the council anonymously, with an accompanying letter of apology and explanation, but the ideas and terminologies employed in the text were found lamentably impenetrable by the relevant authorities.

Growth Towards the Ceiling

(1954–1976)

One of Maximilian's first major acquisitions was an abandoned warehouse, located on the fringes of the city, in Edgware. At first he had not been entirely certain of the use to which he intended to put it, but a number of ideas occurred to him, and he enjoyed visiting the building regularly and dreaming of its potential.

Empty for many years now, the space had gradually fallen into a state of dereliction. It had once been a paint factory, but all of the machinery had long since been sold, and the only trace of its previous use at the time of purchase was a vague lingering odour of paint, somehow still embedded in certain pockets of air, from which it never seemed to leave, being clearly detectable for many years to come.

Maximilian enjoyed observing the forms of decay present in the property, and he spent many afternoons pacing back and forth through the space, often with no definite intentions in mind, sometimes even sitting at a single fixed point for many hours at a time, so that he became intimately acquainted with the building's atmosphere and dimensions, its many interior vantage points, the uses it presented to him.

During the daylight hours, cold light would stream down into the expanses of the building through the enormous dirt-spattered slates of frosted glass that were fixed into its high, vaulted ceilings. Black weeds poked through the thick cracks that had formed in the walls, withering and drooping amongst a canvas of scratches and stains. Certain windows had been broken, leaving glass fangs protruding, as well as gouges that invited the entrance of cold drifts of air. Pipes emerged from the walls tentatively, decided on a definite course, curved for some distance in a new direction, and finally disappeared into other walls. Oily-feathered pigeons nested at the top of flaking iron columns, spraying down patterns of white shit that accrued and hardened over time. In one room the floors were coated with a thin layer of orange dust. Traces of the old factory workers were present in the form of short trails of footprints, mysterious tracks which faded away almost as soon as they commenced.

Finally Maximilian decided that he would dedicate these new premises to sculpture. To a single, giant sculpture, in fact. Commencing at floor-level, he would work on the project for many years, gradually building layer after layer, working his way up in a growing sprawl of forms, multiplying and sprouting strange protrusions, utilizing a vast array of different materials, until he had finally reached the ceiling. Each layer would be roughly the same height, representing the duration of a given year, with materials and objects discovered and purchased only during that period. Ladders